

*'Smash mechanical clocks, automated recordings, assembly lines, the abject dejection of a grey morning in the city when you wake up depressed and pre-menstrual.'* (Mai-Thu Perret, 'Some Notes on Time', in *The Crystal Frontier*, 1999–present)

Imagine dropping out, leaving the capitalist city in order to shape an autonomous community of women devoid of paternalist structure; a 'Year Zero' in the desert where psychedelic experiences let you start from the ground up; where the need for a sustainable architecture and a new Arts and Crafts movement is discussed experimentally, together with the necessity for geometry and the conception of clothes that will reflect the triumphant step of an emancipated new 'modern woman'.

Since 1999, Mai-Thu Perret has been writing fictional accounts of such experiences, building an archive of diary fragments, letters, schedules and song lyrics, supposedly emanating from members of 'New Ponderosa Year Zero', an imaginary female commune set in an indeterminate time somewhere in the desert of New Mexico. Entitled *The Crystal Frontier*, this unresolved script constitutes the underlying principle of Perret's production of hypothetical artefacts, either functional or reflecting the individuality of the members. The shift of authorship on to imaginary heroines allows Perret to produce a highly varied range of objects. In a hybrid mix of modernism, craft and esoteric aesthetics; housing for rabbits recalls 1950s modular architecture, furniture design resembles psychedelic devices, while ceramics, abstract banners and neon signs evoke Bauhaus or Constructivist models.

Through a multiplicity of potential 'authors', itself complicated by the use of appropriated texts, Perret's treatment of *The Crystal Frontier* is becoming increasingly flexible. Rather than serving as illustrations of the texts, her objects connect to a subtext filled with references that echo the wider signification of the fiction. In *Apocalypse Ballet* (2006), the five papier-mâché mannequins frozen in choreographic poses and holding neon hoops do not represent the women of the community. Neither functional objects nor monuments, the mannequins create a theatrical environment mixing references to modernist costume design, gymnastics and Busby Berkeley musicals. Perret decontextualizes these historical fragments to create a layered temporality, pulling the work towards a contemporary moment.

Perret's 2008 exhibition at the Kitchen in New York connected to *The Crystal Frontier* through themes of mysticism and revolutionary endeavour. Inhabited by a uniformed female mannequin sitting next to a Rorschach-patterned carpet, the exhibition's front room displayed wall diagrams of Korean shamanistic dance steps reduced to abstract symbols. Giant commas resembling quotation marks led the viewer towards another room to see *An Evening of the Book* (2007), in which three black and white silent films documenting the restaging of Vitali Zhemchuzhnyi's 1924 agitprop play were projected on wallpaper inspired by Varvara Stepanova. The films, pantomimes of the victory of revolutionary literature, show female dancers interacting with props including a giant book, hula hoops, a black banner and the over-sized commas. As the films ended, the lights came on, and the exhibition space was filled with the sound of Steven Parrino's 'Spider Song', which loosely conjured Marina, a member of 'Ponderosa', who faces her fear of spiders through creating rugs and decoration. [Céline Kopp]

01



01 *White Sands*, 2008  
Aluminium, brass, copper,  
lacquered wood  
187 x 130 x 140 cm

02 *Apocalypse Ballet (neon dress)*, 2006  
Figure in steel, wire,  
papier mâché, acrylic, gouache,  
wig, neon tubes, steel base  
175 x 160 x 160 cm

03 *Heroine of the People  
(Golden Rock)*, 2005  
Wire, papier mâché,  
acrylic paint, gold leaf  
107 x 75 x 75 cm

04 *The Family*, 2007  
Figures in wood, wire, papier mâché,  
acrylic, lacquer and gouache;  
wigs, clothes made by Susanne Zangerl  
and Catherine Zimmermann  
170 x 192 cm  
MDF base  
12 x 250 x 160 cm



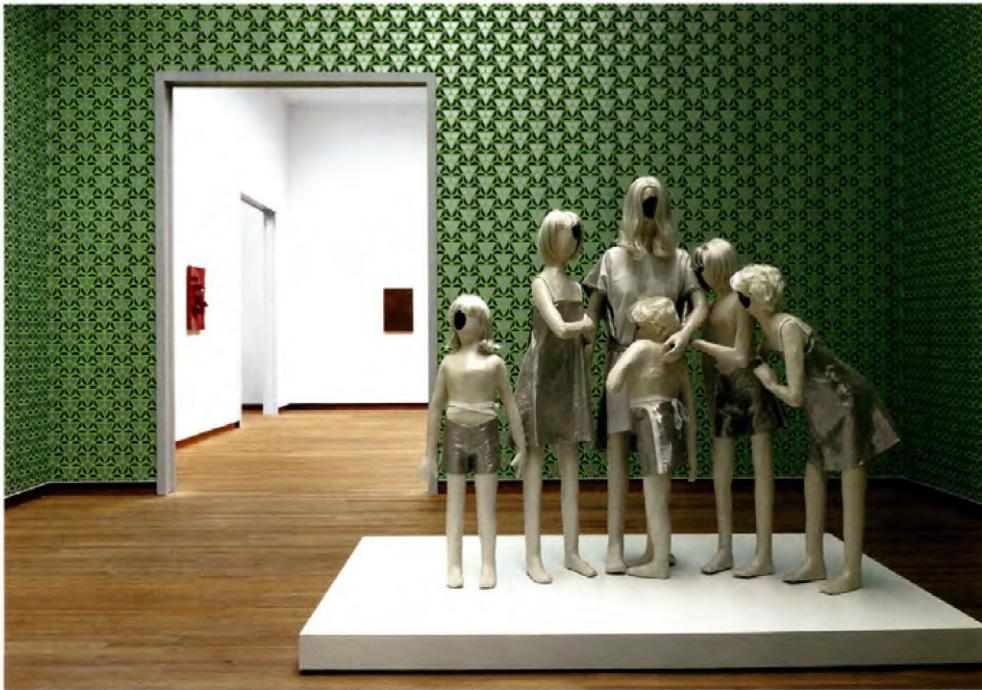
02



225

Mai-Thu Perret

03



04



226

05

Mai-Thu Perret





Mai-Thu Perret

06

05 from front:

- Donna Come Me, 2008  
Mannequin, wig, uniform,  
pom-poms, acrylic paint on carpet  
Dimensions variable  
Carpet  
366 x 198 cm
- Toegankari IV, 2008  
Acrylic paint on wall  
Variable dimensions

06 Little Planetary Harmony, 2006

Aluminium, wood, drywall, latex wall  
paint, fluorescent lighting fixture,  
acrylic gouache on plywood paintings  
356 x 643 x 365 cm